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II.—*Description of the River Usumasinta, in Guatemala.* Communicated by Colonel Don Juan Galindo, of the Central American Service, Corresponding Member of the Royal Geographical Society. Dated Flores, on Lake Peten, 12th March, 1832. Read 26th Nov. 1832.

THE Usumasinta is peculiarly remarkable among the rivers of this part of America, not only for the length of its course, advantages of its navigation, fertility of its banks, and superiority of the climate of its district, but also for the almost total ignorance in which even the inhabitants of the surrounding country remain with respect to its relative position, its course and branches.

Since my residence in its neighbourhood, having bestowed great labour and pains in exploring this river, the following is a sketch of the result:—

The Usumasinta rises in the district of Peten, which is a subdivision of Verapas, the latter being one of the seven departments of the Central American state of Guatemala.

The source of the Usumasinta is not very distant from that of the Belize (rising on the opposite side of the same mountain ridge, and bordering the bay of Honduras on the south-west); and near its source, where it crosses the old road from Flores to the city of Guatemala, is called the Santa Isabel. It afterwards receives many tributary streams, and becoming navigable for canoes, takes the name of Rio de la Pasion, crossing the new, or western, road to Guatemala. Thence it enters the country of the wild Mayas, where it is joined, from the southward, by the important navigable river of Chicsoi, which rises in the department of Totonicapan, having several villages on its banks nearer its source. The general course of the Usumasinta, from the source to the junction of the Chicsoi, is from east to west, whence it inclines to the north-west, as far as the sea.

The Mayas, before the Spanish conquest, occupied the whole peninsula of Yucatan, including the districts of Peten, British Honduras, and the eastern part of Tabasco; and though divided into various tribes, the same language was general amongst them, being that still used by the inhabitants of these countries. The only pure remnant of this great nation are some scattered tribes, occupying principally the banks of the rivers Usumasinta, San Pedro, and Pacaitun; their whole territories being politically included in Peten. They are comparatively a harmless, though uncivilized race, clothing themselves with cotton and the bark of the Indian-rubber tree, and depending principally on fishing and hunting for their support,—in the latter making use of flint-headed arrows. They also cultivate maize, cacao, and tobacco,—the latter of a very superior quality.

A chain of mountains separates the Maya territories from the

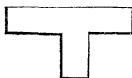
SKETCH OF THE  
COURSE OF THE USUMASINTA,  
CENTRAL AMERICA,  
*to illustrate*  
Colonel Galindo's  
PAPER.



Mexican states, in crossing which the continued navigation of the Usumasinta is interrupted by a considerable cataract. Near these falls, and within an extensive cave on the left bank, are some extraordinary and magnificent ruins; and somewhat lower down the stream there is a remarkable monumental stone, with characters. These objects, the ruins of Palenque\*, and other numerous

\* [The following account of these ruins is also by Colonel Galindo, who is governor of the adjoining province. It has been already printed (*Literary Gazette*, No. 769), but seems worthy of preservation here, a member of the Royal Geographical Society, now in Mexico, having undertaken to correspond with the Society respecting the other similar ruins in that country.]

These ruins extend for more than twenty miles, along the summit of the ridge which separates the country of the wild Maya Indians (included in the district of Peten) from the state of Chiapas, and must anciently have embraced a city and its suburbs. The principal buildings are erected on the most prominent heights, and to several of them, if not to all, stairs were constructed. From the hollows beneath, the steps, as well as all the vestiges which time has left, are wholly of stone and plaster. The principal edifice I have discovered, and style the palace, is built in several squares; but the main halls, or galleries, run in a direction from the N.N.E. to the S.S.W. Allowing for the variation of the compass, which is 9° E., this position, and its perpendicular, are most exactly observed in all the edifices I have examined, be their situation what it may. This is the more remarkable, as it does not arise from the formation of streets, as no such regular communications existed between the houses. These are formed of galleries eight feet wide, separated by walls a yard thick, and two rows of galleries complete the building: the height of the walls to the eaves is nine feet, and thence three yards more to the top, to which the roofs incline, being covered by horizontal stones a foot wide. The chasms between the inner roofs of the two galleries were originally filled up, though containing large niches, and now universally grown over with bushes and trees. The stones, of which all the edifices are built, are about eighteen inches long, nine broad, and two thick, cemented by mortar, and gradually inclining when they form a roof, but always placed horizontally: the outside eaves are supported by large stones, which project about two feet. Doors are numerous in all the halls; and the spaces which contained the top beams are exactly preserved in the stone, though the wood-work has entirely disappeared. All the habitations must have been exceedingly dark, if the doors were of wood and kept shut; as the windows, though many, are but small, circular and square perforations, and subject to no particular arrangement. Evidently, the architects avoided symmetry, not from ignorance but design. Besides the niches in the roof and the windows, the walls are perforated by holes of this shape,



each about two feet wide: they are very frequent; and, though they completely pierce the wall, are separated in the middle by a partition of plaster: their use I cannot divine. Several holes in the walls also contain stone pillars, of from six inches to one foot high; some capable of holding the strongest animal, and others delicately small; inserted both high and low, and not always opposite to one another.

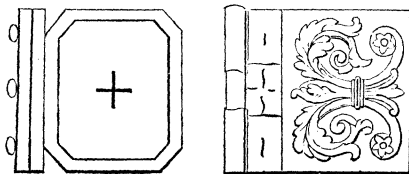
The front of the palace contains five doors, lofty and wide, as in all the buildings; on each of the pillars which separate them is an erect human figure in relief: in most of these, throughout the ruins, it is difficult to distinguish men from women, as their dress appears the same; the head adorned with high plumes, the breast and arms naked, with necklaces and bracelets, and sometimes covered by a short tippet; the middle and thighs inclosed in a wrapper, crowded with ornaments, and its ends finely worked, hanging down between the legs, which are naked, as well as the feet. Some figures are distinguished by the awkward height of their head-dress, and the unnatural horizontal projection of the bows and ends of the sash which fastens the wrapper: all the heads are in profile, and many hold

remains contained in the countries watered by the Usumasinta and its branches, prove that at a period of remote antiquity (cer-

long staves in their hands, headed by some undefinable objects; but no weapons are to be seen with any of the figures or basso-relievos, and none have ever been found but flint heads of arrows or lances, similar, though larger, to those used by the wild Indians at the present day. There are also some squatted figures, apparently of plebeians, with wrappers, but without any ornaments or head-dress. The sashes, &c. of several appear to have been coloured, and even much of the writing was painted.

The grand centre entrance of the palace, joining its two front galleries, and under which I have bivouacked, never had any door, and its top is circular: behind the second gallery, steps descend into an inner court, and on each side of them are three gigantic busts, worked in relievo, on inclined stones. In another of the courts are the remains of a square tower, still about a hundred feet high, as its top has fallen: the steps which lead up through its interior are rectangular, and it contains a regular series of doors or windows. In one of the galleries of the palace is a sort of picture, contained on a stone of an oval shape, about two yards in diameter: the figures are in relievo, and still bear evidence of having been coloured: a female, dressed as above described, and with ear-rings, sits cross-legged on a seat or sofa, which is just large enough to hold her, and has at each end the representation of an animal's head, with a collar round the neck; a person, apparently an old woman, dressed in a tippet and wrapper, both worked like a plaid, presents, on her knees, to the sitting female, a human head, adorned with a solitary tuft of feathers. *The back of the head is turned towards the lady*, who looks earnestly on it, while her expression of grief and horror is well represented,—her right hand is near her heart, and the left rests on her thigh. Some square tablets are inscribed in the upper part of the picture; the wall around is of various colours, and an inscription on the cornice overhead is painted in two horizontal rows of small square tablets. Near this is the principal entrance to the vaults, which run underneath the palace, and which I have explored by candle-light, though much annoyed by the large bats that infest all the ruins. Over this same entrance are worked, in relievo, the figure of a rabbit on one side, and an ugly human figure on the other; both surrounded by filigree work, apparently imitating boughs and feathers. The architecture of the vaults is similar to that of the buildings above ground. A female head, over one of the passages, with an ornament pendent from her nose, represents grief or sleep. This circumstance, and that of the vaults containing a number of what are apparently stone couches, led me to suppose they were used as dormitories.

‘The building which I name the study stands on a neighbouring and higher hill than the palace, and the ascent to it is very steep; it has five doors, each with evidence of having contained wooden frames; the pillars or walls separating them contain full-length figures of about six feet high, one of which is dressed in a petticoat, reaching nearly to the ankle, and fringed at the bottom, bearing, as well as another figure, naked infants on the right arm, and not in the manner of the modern Indian women, who always set their children astride on their hips. The inside walls of the study contain three large stone quadrangles, each divided by indented lines into 240 equal compartments, about six inches square, twelve running from top to bottom, and twenty from side to side, and containing different characters in relievo. I have copied those in best preservation, of which the two following are a specimen:—the same characters appear to be very rarely repeated in the various tablets.



tainly prior to the fourteenth century, when Mexico was founded) this was the most civilized portion of America.

‘A building, apparently used for religious purposes, stands on a hill in the vicinity, and still higher than the preceding edifices; two galleries form its foundation; the front one occupying its whole length, the back divided into three compartments. The eastern of these has the appearance of a dungeon, though its very small entrance has no evidence of a door. The western compartment is a simple room; the centre piece is also without a door; but, from the pillars inserted, as already described, in the walls, I conjecture it had curtains. This room has a small chapel built within it, having a flat top: the back of the chapel, and two stone slabs which form the front, but leave between them a wide entrance, are highly and elegantly worked in relief. On the west stone is the representation of a man looking towards the entrance, his head adorned with boughs and feathers; a small crane is seated on one of the boughs, with a fish in its mouth: he has a tippet, trousers halfway down the thigh, bands round his calves, and a sort of boot without soles, only covering the back of the leg,—a horrid figure, squatted down, with its back turned to the upright one, has no feet, but its legs terminate in a tail. The other slab contains a hideous old man, with a bough in his mouth. Opposite these two figures are stone pillars, as elsewhere observed, both near the floor and higher up, to which victims or culprits may have been tied. Inside, on the back wall of the chapel, are two small human figures; the larger one placing the head of a man, adorned with feathers, on the top of a cross, *such a one exactly as used by Christians*; the other represents a child, both looking at the head, barefooted, with their ankles adorned; behind each of them are sets of square tablets, containing characters very neatly executed. Perhaps I am wrong in supposing this to be a chapel, and that human victims were sacrificed in it; these deeds have generally been executed in the presence of large assemblies of people, while but comparatively few could have witnessed them if done here. This might, therefore, have been a canopy, under which magistrates sat in the administration of justice. Above all these rooms, two narrow parallel walls ascend to a height of eighty feet above the ground: they are perforated by squares, and between them one ascends by projecting stones to the top, whence there is a most extensive view over the plains to the north.

‘About two hundred yards below the palace, a limpid stream has its rise; it bursts from between the rocks, and is covered over from its source, for more than a hundred yards, by a gallery, which follows its bend; where the gallery ends, there is evidence of a continuation of edifices for about fifty yards more down the course of the stream: the whole appears a strange arrangement.

‘Not far hence is a prison on the edge of a stupendous precipice: by placing a stone over it, the captive was effectually prevented from escaping, though large windows in the edge of the precipice admitted light and an extensive view.

‘The whole of the ruins are now buried in a thick forest; and months might be delightfully employed in exploring them. My time is unfortunately limited; but I have seen sufficient to ascertain the high civilization of their former inhabitants, and that they possessed the art of representing sounds by signs, with which I hitherto believed that no Americans, previous to the conquest, were acquainted.

‘The neighbouring country, for many leagues distant, contains remains of the ancient labours of its people—bridges, reservoirs, monumental inscriptions, subterraneous edifices, &c.; but this spot was evidently the capital, and none could be better chosen for the metropolis of a civilized, commercial, and extended nation; having, from its elevation, a most delightful temperature; behind it a still cooler region for the supply of such productions as a warmer sun does not admit of; and before it the extensive, flat, and hot regions of Tabasco and Yucatan,—the former, in the more immediate neighbourhood, intersected by large, deep, and navigable rivers, which, with their innumerable ramifications and connexions with the sea, offer every facility for an immense commerce. It is strikingly remarkable, the almost exact corresponding situation of this country in the new, with that which Egypt held in the old world, placed at the junction of the northern and southern continents, with a mediterranean sea, a delta, and an isthmus. Everything bears testimony that these surprising people were not physically dissimilar from the pre-

The banks of the Usumasinta, after passing the ridge, are studded with various Mexican villages, the inhabitants of which find a lucrative employment in the cutting of log-wood. Further down, the river is joined by the San Pedro from the east.

The river San Pedro rises near the lake of Peten, and traversing the district, further down, on being joined by the stream of Yalchilan, forms the national boundary of central America and Mexico. The waters of the San Pedro possess petrifying qualities to a most extraordinary degree, the numerous reefs and dams in its stream being formed entirely by petrified wood. Where channels have been cut deep in the rocks, both the lower and the upper part appear to be petrification, which has gradually grown above the original wood; and where the current is most rapid, the petrification is most speedily performed. A navigable canal, called the Chocop, joins the San Pedro to the Pacaitun, which latter river runs into the lake of Terminos.

Below the mouth of the San Pedro, the Usumasinta is joined, from the south, by the navigable stream of Chacamas, which rises in the hills on which stand the ruins of Palenque.

sent Indians; but their civilization far surpassed that of the Mexicans and Peruvians: they must have existed long prior to the fourteenth century; since the former, who would have been their neighbours, and not deficient in enterprise and talent, would certainly otherwise have learnt from them the art of writing. I would say, that this nation was destroyed by an irruption of barbarians from the north-west, which is an additional reason for giving them a much higher antiquity than the foundation of Mexico, as long previous to that event it is known that no such irruptions had taken place.

‘I also presume, that the Maya language is derived from them: it is still spoken by all the Indians, and even by most of the other inhabitants throughout Yucatan, the district of Peten, and the eastern part of Tabasco; the Puctunc, a slight corruption of it, is spoken in this immediate vicinity, and to the south-west, nearly as far as the Pacific. Why this original language should be more corrupted near the ancient seat of empire than in the distant provinces, is no more to be accounted for than the greater similarity of the Portuguese than the Italian to the Latin. The following words are Maya and Puctunc,—*king*, sun; *uh*, moon; *ek*, stars; *ha*, water; *kak*, fire. There is a great similarity between these languages and those spoken farther to the south throughout the state of Guatemala, particularly in numeration, which, in the Puctunc, is as follows, and the Maya differs but little from it:—1, humpel; 2, chapel; 3, ushpel; 4, chumpel; 5, hopel; 6, wokpel; 7, hukpel; 8, washakpel; 9, bolompel; 10, lakumpel.

‘With regard to the present inhabitants of these regions, the wild Indians to the south are an uncivilized and timid tribe, who occupy an immense tract of country in the interior of the continent; and the subdued Indians, who inhabit the states of Chiapas and Tabasco, are equally in a low scale of improvement. When asked who built these edifices, they reply, “The devil!” A pretty village, styled Palenque, and which has had the honour of giving its name to these ruins, was built about a century ago, six miles to the north-east. The longevity of its inhabitants, and the beauty of its women, prove the excellence of this climate. At a party there, a few days ago, I inquired of the priest and alcalde, as the oracles of Palenque, who they supposed were the builders of these ancient edifices. The priest shook his head, and hinted at their being antediluvian! while the alcalde stoutly affirmed that they must have been built by a colony of Spaniards, prior to the conquest.’

The Tulijá, which further down falls into the Usumasinta from the south-west, is remarkable for the remains of a stone bridge whose arches are under water, and on the right side the stream has separated the bridge from the bank. The Tulijá, at this spot, is about a quarter of a mile in breadth. This bridge I consider of the same antiquity as the other ruins of the country.

The river Tabasco, which, near the sea, also joins the Usumasinta from the south-west, flows by the city of San Juan Bautista, formerly Villa Ferosa, capital of the state of Tabasco, a port of entry much frequented by vessels from the United States of North America.

The Usumasinta, below the cataract, is navigated in boats of considerable burthen, and flows in numerous channels and ramifications; but its principal mouth is at the port of Victoria, where it joins the bay of Campeachy, to the westward of the lake of Terminos. The bar at the mouth is passed by merchant vessels, which sail up to San Juan Bautista.

### III.—*Account of the Route to be pursued by the Arctic Land Expedition in Search of Captain Ross.* Communicated by Captain Back, R. N. Read, 10th Dec. 1831.

It is almost unnecessary to state that the sympathy of the public has been warmly excited in favour of a projected expedition to go in search of, and if possible to afford relief to, Captain Ross and his crew of nineteen persons, who have been absent a little more than three years from England.

The narrative of the Albany and Discovery, as quoted from Mr. Barrow's Chronological History of Arctic Voyages, is too generally circulated to require repetition here; and in reference to Ross and his gallant associates, we may certainly say, in the language of the same distinguished author, that it is impossible to 'contemplate their forlorn situation without the deepest emotion for the unhappy fate of so many wretched beings, cut off from all human aid, and almost from all hope of ever being able to leave their dark and dismal abode.'—(p. 151.)

The projected expedition will consist of two officers and about eighteen men, all of them accustomed to the duties and fatigue of travelling in America; and some of Sir John Franklin's companions on his last journey have volunteered their services on the occasion. It is of importance that the party, when furnished with such supplies as may be deemed essential, should leave Liverpool